



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Mitt Romney, Governor ♦ Kerry Healey, Lt. Governor ♦ Jane Wallis Gumble, Director

ELECTRONIC APPLICATION TRAINING

FREQUENTLY ASKED LHA QUESTIONS

Q 1. Is the Virtual Gateway Sapphire?

No, the Virtual Gateway is a Pilot program for 25 staff members from 12 Housing Assistance Providers (HAPs) testing the electronic-applications to state-aided family public housing only.

Q 2. Will each electronic application submitted to the LHA Inbox need to be printed?

Yes. The way the system indicates that an electronic-application has been received is a result of the staff person printing the e-application. Once the print button is pressed the system automatically changes the status to Received.

Q 3. Once application is printed, what do we do? Do we have to wait for the verification information to come to the LHA and is this to be received within a 14 day period?

POLICY CHANGE

At the training sessions for the VG E-Application Pilot Program, LHAs were instructed to log any applicant who is requesting emergency status (priority 1-4), as of the date and time the e-application was received. The applicant would then have up to 14 calendar days to get the verification to the HAP provider. The HAP provider then would have 3 business days to get the verification documents to the LHAs where the applicant applied. If the above time frames were met, then the applicant's date of emergency priority status would be the date of the original on-line submission.

Due to numerous concerns regarding the fairness of this policy in relation to homeless applicants not in this Pilot Program, we are changing this policy to make it consistent with existing tenant selection procedures. **All e-applications submitted to LHAs will be entered into the Master File Ledger as standard applications, as of the date the e-application is received, regardless of whether or not the applicant has indicated homelessness. The control number must also be recorded in the VG system.**

When the LHA receives all supporting documentation and verification of priority status a new control number must be assigned, as of the date of receipt, to the application, recorded in the LHAs Master File Ledger and in the VG system. In the VG system, the LHA can search for the application via the VG number and/or the original standard control number. Once the LHA determines the applicant eligible for priority status, the new control number will be recorded in the appropriate bedroom size Waiting List Ledger.

- Q 4. Each LHA may screen applications for emergency status differently. What happens when an applicant has been determined eligible at one LHA and ineligible at another? Do you expect us to call each one and ask why they were deemed eligible or ineligible?**

Determination of eligibility, qualification, and priority preference status is determined by each LHA in accordance with DHCD regulations, as it is done currently. The difference with the e-application is that the applicant is given a list (Next Steps) of the types of documents that an LHA will accept as verification. HAPs were told during the training that each LHA has the right to make its own determination of eligibility and qualification, and it is up to the applicant to prove their eligibility and qualification. They were also told that documents required by each LHA may be different. An example that one of the HAPs raised was whether or not an LHA could require a credit check, even though another one may not. We responded yes. As long as what the LHA is asking for is allowed within the parameters of DHCD's regulations and guidelines they can require a particular type of verification.

It is up to each LHA as to whether or not you want to call other LHAs to discuss why they have made a different determination from the one you have made. There is no requirement to do this.

- Q 5. When an LHA makes a unit offer, is the LHA to call the other LHAs that the applicant has applied to for housing?**

No, there is no requirement to do this, but there is nothing that prohibits you from contacting the other LHAs. Since all e-applicants will be signing a FIPA, we will be generating reports that identify applicants that have received a unit offer, at which LHA, and whether the applicant accepted or rejected the offer. DHCD will make this report available to LHAs to assist LHAs in managing waiting lists. If an applicant has accepted or refused a unit offer at one LHA, all other LHAs will change the status of the applicant on their waiting list. Once SAPHIRE is implemented, LHAs will see the status of an applicant at all other LHAs where the applicant has applied.

- Q 6. There is a concern about the DTA requirement that applicants apply for housing within a 20 mile radius. If an LHAs has only a few units of family housing that fall within a 20 mile radius of a large City, the LHA is concerned that it will receive almost every application from those HAPs.**

The LHA has always been within this 20 mile radius, and therefore, has always been receiving applications from shelter applicants from the large City. Due to a DTA policy change applicants no longer have to continually apply to LHAs outside of the 20 mile radius where the applicant will never consider living just for the sake of applying for housing. This should actually cut down on the number of

applications you will receive. DTA is revising the 20 mile radius policy. Also remember, that the system only provides the applicant with a list of LHAs with units that have the appropriate number of bedrooms with an open waiting list. Further, HAPs know not to send applications everywhere because if their client refuses the applicant loses priority status at all LHAs where the applicant has applied for housing. Remember, with sufficient documentation of long waits, LHAs can request to close waiting lists.

Q 7. Do all LHAs have to accept the e-application and if an applicant wants to file a paper application. Do all LHAs have to accept the Universal Application(s)?

Yes, any LHA with an open waiting list cannot refuse to process either the e-application or the paper Universal Application(s).

Q 8. Do applications have to have original signatures?

Original signatures are not required. A photo-copy of the signature affixed to the original document is as valid as the original. This language is contained on the universal and electronic applications.

Q 9. Can we add to “work number” a field for an extension?

No. This will be considered as a future enhancement to the system.

Q 10. Will forms be in Spanish/other languages, if not, would they have a translation notice on top?

Only the FIPA notice will be translated at this time.

Q 11. Computer Issue: Date Moved In screen under Landlord/Owner screen for current address, when you list your current address as the shelter, the system will not allow entering the current month.

Virtual Gateway will change this.

Q 12. Checklist that is given to the applicant lists Social Security Number and Alien Registration Number; does computer let you enter the Alien Registration Number?

Yes.

Q 13. Can an LHA fax number be removed from listing to avoid illegible copies, etc?

Yes, we are requesting this change.

Q 14. Could Virtual Gateway number be printed /stamped as a header on each form/document received by LHA?

Yes, the electronic summary **when printed** shows the head of household, application number and page number on each page of summary.

Q 15. How does an applicant file an e-application at an LHA that has a site specific waiting list system?

Virtual Gateway-E-application system lists development specific status for both Boston and Cambridge H.A (currently the only LHAs with site specific lists). Applicants applying to Boston or Cambridge must select site(s) to which they want to apply. E-application is then sent to Boston and Cambridge H.A.'s inbox for processing.

Q 16. Provide LHA with a listing of HAP providers, and possible case management staff.

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Q 17. Is there a way to delineate eligible for priority vs. standard in the processing status?

No, this will be done for SAPHIRE. Eligible for e-application refers to eligibility for the program not priority. The definitions of status are contained in the User Guide.

Q 18. Possibilities of scanning documents into system to be sent electronically to LHA?

Not at this time, but we are investigating for SAPHIRE.

Q 19. LHAs are concerned about sharing offer refusal information with other LHAs. The concern is two-fold; 1) How is this accomplished? and 2) What provision of the regulation allows for the removal of priority status at other LHAs because an applicant has accepted or refused a unit offer at another LHA? An e-mail system for LHAs would be helpful.

1) DHCD Legal Department has ruled that there is no reason why DHCD or an LHA cannot provide other LHAs with the information that an applicant household has been housed or has rejected an offer of housing so long as the applicant executes a FIPA statement reflecting that such a use may be made of the information.

2) One of the conditions that must be met to receive priority status is that the applicant must have been making reasonable efforts to locate housing. If an applicant has refused a unit offer without substantial cause, the applicant no longer meets this requirement. If the applicant accepts a unit offer, the applicant is no longer homeless.

DHCD maintains an excel spreadsheet of LHA e-mail addresses which we will share with you, however, the e-mail address is generally only the executive director's address.

Q 20. Are there any safeguards to guard against multiple/duplicate e-applications being submitted as participant travels to another HAP?

DHCD is working on this with Virtual Gateway and DTA to make sure this information is shared. Right now when a participant moves from one HAP to another information is shared by fax or mail. One of the issues we are working on with Virtual Gateway and DTA is to find a way for the new HAP to access the e-application that has already been submitted by the previous HAP. This will eliminate the duplication of another e-application submittal.

Q 21. What if an applicant submits another application after a unit offer refusal?

If an applicant submits another application after a unit offer refusal the LHA will determine the applicant ineligible for priority or preference status received on the previous application for a period of three years.

Q 22. The e-application does not state bedroom size on any of the summary documents?

DHCD is working with Virtual Gateway to have this information included.

Q 23. Will DHCD be doing a mass mailing repeating instructions to HAP providers and LHAs?

No, User Manuals for both the HAP providers and LHAs are on line at Virtual Gateway Housing Application and on DHCD's web page, there is also the Virtual Gateway Help Desk, 1-800-421-0938. HAP providers and LHAs will be notified of the go live date of the e-application through the Virtual Gateway.

- Q 24. There needs to be two additional standard buttons under the “Application/Inquiry Status”: (1) Standard; no verifications forthcoming and (2) Standard; not eligible for homeless status.**

Status currently, has nothing to do with priority status. Status indicates whether or not applicant is eligible or qualified for program. Please refer to the definitions provided in the User Guide. The eligibility letter sent out by the LHA informs applicant of priority and preference status, and their appeal rights.

- Q 25. Could the LHA change the status from Submitted to Received without printing the Summary Application? LHAs will receive in the mail a copy of the signed E-application Summary. It is duplication and it is too much paper.**

This is the manner in which the existing system is set-up for other Virtual Gateway Inbox Users. An action had to be built in to the system to trigger the automatic change from Submitted to Received in the Inbox. In addition, by printing the application it provides the Intake person with a piece of paper reminding him/her that a Control Number needs to be issued and the e-application needs to be logged in to the Master Ledger File. Once the signed E-application Summary is received the LHA can either keep or discard the one they printed.

- Q 26. Why sign application request, on every page if penalty of perjury already signed?**

Important that applicant and HAP know what they reviewed is what was submitted.

- Q 27. Can LHAs access the Virtual Gateway if computer is a Macintosh?**

It should work fine as long as the User is using an “Internet Explorer” or “Netscape” browser to access the application. The actual computer should not matter. See the browser compatibility information on the before you begin page.

- Q 28. Under the 5 year residency informative fields, applicants can input “Can’t remember, unknown” and move forward in the application, but the application may be deemed incomplete by the LHA. What if applicant doesn’t have 5 years landlord history?**

No don't deem application incomplete. This information is required at the time the LHA determines whether or not the applicant is qualified. The five (5) year housing history requirement is in the regulation. See 760 CMR 5.12(2). The regulation also provides a procedure for when landlord references are unavailable. “If, after request, the LHA has failed to receive a reference from a landlord (or housing provider) it shall notify applicant of non-receipt, and the LHA shall request that applicant use his or her best efforts to cause the landlord (or housing provider) to submit the reference to the LHA. IN the event the applicant uses his or her best efforts but is unsuccessful, the applicant shall cooperate with the LHA in securing information from other sources about the tenancy. Non-receipt of a reference from a landlord (or housing provider) shall be cause for determining an applicant unqualified unless the applicant can show that he or she has used best efforts to secure the reference and that he or she has complied with reasonable requests for cooperation in securing other

information.” I want to point out that this is a screening requirement for qualifications not for eligibility or for priority status.

Q 29. How do LHAs insure control numbers are issued in numerical/chronological order when applications are being received three different ways, e-application, universal application through the mail, and universal application hand-delivered?

An LHA should check e-applications before logging in a mailed or hand-delivered application. Another way to handle this is to designate a time at the end of day to issue control numbers to applications received that day. What this means though, is receipts will not be handed out, but will be mailed to all applicants.

Q 30. At certain LHAs, a control number is not issued until the CORI is completed, therefore, the e-application submittal date cannot apply. How is CORI accomplished from a remote location, as there is a requirement to have a picture identification?

CORI is not part of application. CORI law states that LHAs (not HAPs) obtain CORI when applicant is close to the top of the waiting list. In addition, the LHA needs to have the most current information.

Q 31. Do LHAs have to send receipt since each application has a time and date stamp?

LHA needs to send because they have to issue control number.